

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 January 2025

Present:

Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Atkinson, Ellis-Jones, Haigh, Jobson, Knott, Moore, Palmer, Rees, Rolstone, Snow and Williams, M

Apologies:

Councillors Hughes

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Bialyk, Wood and Wright

In attendance:

Councillor Wetenhall

Also present:

Strategic Director for Place, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Legal Advisor and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

54 Announcement from the Chair

The Chair made the following announcement:

“Regarding the expected item: Working Towards Net Zero - Exeter City Council's Corporate Carbon Footprint Report and Carbon Reduction Action Plan Progress Report:

The report will be presented to Executive first, to discuss the wider implications of the study on budgets, capacity, and service delivery across the organisation. Following the presentation to Executive in March the report and study will be presented to this Committee in April.”

55 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2024 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

56 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

57 Questions from Members of the Public Under Standing Order No.19

There was one question from the public. The Chair invited Mr C to read his question:

“The Deputy Leader’s report refers to a forthcoming review of the Constitution. Will the Council seek views from Exeter’s civil society organisations and/or the public before finalising proposals for change?”

The Deputy Leader responded:

“No. The constitution relates to internal governance aimed at facilitating the Council’s effective operation and decision making. The review of the City Council’s constitution is overseen by the Council’s Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer will work with the Council’s Chief Executive on the review.

Any changes to the constitution will be considered by either the Executive or the Audit and Governance committee for approval by full Council.”

Mr C asked a supplementary question in the following terms: “Does the Council not consider that information from the public would be helpful there would the Deputy Leader reconsider her response?”

The Deputy Leader responded making the following points:

- the decision to adopt a new Constitution would be decided by full Council;
- all local authorities had a constitution;
- there was no legal obligation for public consultation on changes to the constitution;
- changes would aim to improve efficiency within the council and to streamline processes; and
- accessibility would be improved by changes including but not limited to the inclusion of digital links and the loss of duplicated information.

58 **Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order No.20**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillors Wetenhall and Moore in relation to the Portfolio of Councillors Bialyk and Wood who attended the meeting. The questions were circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee. The questions and responses of the respective Portfolio Holder are set out below:

Question from Councillor Wetenhall:

Regarding Exeter City Council's decision to sell off the Grace Road Field, in order to enable the development of an energy plant on the site.

The developers of the energy plant that this field is being sold for, say that they have researched 14 other sites where they might have located the plant and that the Grace Road site was the only suitable site. Can [the leader / portfolio holder] confirm that the Council has no information about these other sites and if that is true, has therefore accepted the assertion of the developer without any supporting evidence?

Response from the Leader

Exeter Energy Ltd is a private commercial company, the roll-out of the DHN and the location of the energy centre is their commercial decision. Exeter Energy undertook their own due diligence in choosing the most suitable site available for their energy centre, the City Council were not involved in that decision making process. Exeter Energy approached the City Council Estates team once Grace Road Field was their preferred option. The planning application is supported by a note which sets out other sites they have considered.

Supplementary Question and Response

Does the Leader not think the Council has a duty to ensure that this was the only possible site? The Leader responded stating that the estates team had been in discussion with the developer and that the Planning Committee would look at the application when it came before them.

Questions from Councillor Moore:

Question

Exeter will be hosting the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2025 and we will welcome the teams and the supporters to the city. Please can the portfolio holder explain the travel plan arrangements for matches?

Response from the Leader

Exeter Rugby Club were hosting the women's world cup and the City Council was working closely with them to support the delivery of, what would be a marvellous event and opportunity in Exeter. A travel plan would be discussed with the relevant authorities and the club, and I am confident, as before a sensible and workable plan would be agreed at the appropriate time.

Supplementary Question and Response

Do women or others have to make other travel arrangements as the No. 77 bus only runs for men's games? The Leader responded stating that the bus was run by Exeter Rugby Club but that the safety of women and girls was important and he would mention this to the Chair of the rugby club.

Question

Please can you provide an update on work to develop the flood safety/egress strategy for the Haven Banks area?

Response from the Leader

The two levels of Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (levels 1 and 2) required for the Exeter Plan have been published with the Exeter Plan as part of its evidence base. These documents were available on the Exeter Plan website. Further work was ongoing to consider in more detail the potential safe access and egress route for the Water Lane area. The Environment Agency and Devon County Council have been involved in these pieces of work. The infrastructure evidence for the Exeter Plan also identified the need for a future safe access and egress route for Water Lane.

Supplementary Question and Response

Will the developer be required to contribute? The Leader asked the Director to provide an answer. The Strategic Director for Place responded that the developer would be required to contribute.

Questions from Councillor Moore for Councillor Wood:

Question

The Wellbeing Exeter Contract signed in the Members information bulletin [1] is reported £2.9m. This does not seem to align with the committee report's recommendations that were approved: [Report - Community Grants Programme 202526 FINAL.pdf](#) [8.10].

Please can you explain why the report and the contract value differs?

Response

£2.9 million stated in the Councillor Bulletin, is the projected maximum contract value including for the core and enhanced model identified through the procurement process and covers 3 years 9 months. Community Grants Programme report covers only 3 years however the programme requires that there would be external funding secured to support delivery.

Supplementary Question and Response

What was the value of the Sport England contribution? Councillor Wood responded that the figure requested was in both reports and should further detail be required the councillor should contact the Strategic Director for People and Communities.

Question

Please can you also confirm if this is a two-year rolling report as suggested in the paper or a fixed term contract?

Response

The programme had a 9-month contract with the option for three additional years.

Supplementary Question and Response

Can you clarify the financial situation agreed in the report as it is complex? Councillor Wood responded in agreement that it was complex but that the work of the programme as had been recognised for its good work and invested in. Further detail could be requested from the Strategic Director for People and Communities if desired.

59 Portfolio Holders Report - Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services & City Centre

The Deputy Leader, Councillor Wright presented her report as Portfolio Holder for Corporate Service and City Centre drawing attention to the following points:

- changes had been made in response to audits;
- EDI had been restructured into HR; and
- there had been a focus on corporate Health and Safety.

The Deputy Leader responded to Members' questions making the following points:

- there was no plan to extend the area covered by the Community Safety team but this could be a possibility in future should funding be available;
- the sounding board was not yet determined but would be cross-party;
- Council would approve any constitutional changes;
- there was no funding available to support St Sidwell's in providing security but she would be happy to discuss making links with police;
- the City Centre Strategy was not a planning document;
- initial data from the councillor, business and community workshops on the City Centre Strategy had been received and public consultation would be next;
- there would be an action plan and it would be costed;
- there was no answer available on new legislation with regard to rent auctions but it was of note that the vacancy rate in the city centre was low;
- she had spoken publicly regarding the diminished prominence in the crime plan of plans to address violence against women and girls;
- she would speak to officers about how publicity of CCTV monitoring could be more positive;
- the Cathedral didn't pay towards CCTV but they did pay the InExeter levy;
- CCTV was provided for other towns which would be cost neutral;
- She would enquire of officers if there was a policy on the prevention of sexual harassment and the feasibility of training being made available to councillors as well as staff; and
- Exeter Canal and Quay Trust had not met due to their last meeting being postponed and it would be for ECQT Board to consider the recommendation.

Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan

Councillor Wetenhall, under Standing Order No. 44 presented her proposal remarking that there were markets all over the city and there could be an exploration of joining up with licensing.

Councillors Mitchell, Moore, Rees and Palmer spoke in support of the proposal making the following points:

- Scrutiny could look at what other local authorities had in place;
- There was a piece of work by InExeter which could be helpful;
- A licensing street-trading working group had noted markets as a linked subject and it would be good to join this up; and
- Clarification could be sought with regard to the Market Charter responsibilities.

Councillors Atkinson, Knott, Rolstone spoke against the proposal but in support of markets within the city and highlighted the SMB comments regarding resourcing of a task and finish group alongside the need to ensure work was aligned to the corporate priorities.

Having received officer advice, Councillor Atkinson proposed and Councillor Mitchell seconded a motion that a Briefing on Markets and Street Trading In Exeter be added to the work plan and following a vote was **CARRIED** unanimously.

Members commented on the work plan.

Following a vote the draft Scrutiny Work Plan as amended was **AGREED**.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.23 pm

Chair

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WORK PLAN FOR SCRUTINY ITEMS 2024/25*Working Draft*

Strategic Scrutiny Committee	Item	Strategic Director	Portfolio Holder	Origin of Business	Status
3 April 2025	Portfolio Holder's Report (Cllr Wood & Foale)	Strategic Director for Place (IC)	Portfolio Holder Leisure Services & Healthy Living (Cllr Wood) and Portfolio Holder Arts, Culture & Tourism (Cllr Foale)		
3 April 2025	Live and Move Programme Update	Chief Executive	Portfolio Holder Leisure Services & Healthy Living (Cllr Wood)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee half yearly	
3 April 2025	Working Towards Net Zero - Exeter City Council's Corporate Carbon Footprint Report and Carbon Reduction Action Plan Progress Report	Strategic Director for Place (IC), Service Lead Net Zero & Business (VH)	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Vizard)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 29 September 2022 half yearly report	
5 June 2025	Portfolio Holder's Report (Cllr tbc)				
5 June 2025	Progress Report Shared Prosperity Fund - Update	Strategic Director for Place (IC) Service Lead Net Zero & Business (VH)	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Vizard)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 29 September 2022 half yearly report	
5 June 2025	Markets & Street Trading in Exeter – Briefing Note	Strategic Director for Place (IC) & Strategic Director for Corporate Resources (DH)	Portfolio Holder	Proposal from Cllr Wetenhall received Dec 2024	

Strategic Scrutiny Committee	Item	Strategic Director	Portfolio Holder	Origin of Business	Status
	Portfolio Holder Update (TBC)				
TBC September 2025	Live and Move Programme Update	Chief Executive	Portfolio Holder Leisure Services & Healthy Living (Cllr Wood)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 16 March 2023 half yearly	

Combined Strategic Scrutiny and Customer Focus					
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